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Security Council

Seventy-first year

Provisional

7744th meeting
Monday, 25 July 2016, 10 a.m.
New York

President:	Mr. Bessho	(Japan)
Members:	Angola	Mr. Lucas
	China	Mr. Wu Haitao
	Egypt	Mr. Aboulatta
	France	Mr. Delattre
	Malaysia	Mr. Ibrahim
	New Zealand	Mr. Van Bohemen
	Russian Federation	Mr. Churkin
	Senegal	Mr. Seck
	Spain	Mr. Oyarzun Marchesi
	Ukraine	Mr. Yelchenko
	United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland	Mr. Rycroft
	United States of America	Ms. Power
	Uruguay	Mr. Bermúdez
	Venezuela (Bolivarian Republic of)	Mr. Suárez Moreno

Agenda

The situation in the Middle East

Report of the Secretary-General on the implementation of Security Council resolutions 2139 (2014), 2165 (2014), 2191 (2014) and 2258 (2015) (S/2016/631)

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The meeting was called to order at 10 a.m.

Adoption of the agenda

The agenda was adopted.

The situation in the Middle East

Report of the Secretary-General on the implementation of Security Council resolutions 2139 (2014), 2165 (2014), 2191 (2014) and 2258 (2015) (S/2016/631)

The President: In accordance with rule 37 of the Council's provisional rules of procedure, I invite the representative of the Syrian Arab Republic to participate in this meeting.

In accordance with rule 39 of the Council's provisional rules of procedure, I invite Mr. Stephen O'Brien, Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs and Emergency Relief Coordinator, to participate in this meeting.

The Security Council will now begin its consideration of the item on its agenda.

I wish to draw the attention of Council members to document S/2016/631, which contains the report of the Secretary-General on the implementation of Security Council resolutions 2139 (2014), 2165 (2014), 2191 (2014) and 2258 (2015).

I now give the floor to Mr. O'Brien.

Mr. O'Brien: Every time I have briefed the Council, I have described the horrors of a brutal conflict characterized by the complete failure to protect civilians, which has generated gargantuan levels of suffering for most civilians. Truth be told, words are not adequate to depict the grim and gruesome reality facing the people of Syria today. We have seen the hopes of ordinary Syrians for an end to their nightmare raised and then dashed time and again as the Government, non-State armed groups and terrorist groups have relentlessly continued on a military path that has further devastated cities, towns, communities and families. As the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights recently said, "The number of war crimes already committed surpasses our worst nightmares".

The fighting and violence have escalated across several parts of the country over the last few weeks, resulting in widespread civilian deaths, injury and displacement. Strikes, by all sides, continue to be launched on and from heavily populated areas from the air and the ground without regard for civilian presence. Attacks on other civilian infrastructure remain an almost daily occurrence in some areas. A recent World Health Organization (WHO) report indicated that health care is attacked in Syria more than in any other place on Earth.

The undeniable fact is that today, in many places, civilians in Syria are as much at risk as they have ever been, owing to the parties' continued blatant disregard for international humanitarian law, whose primary and overarching principle, as advocated by but also supposedly enforced by the Security Council, is the obligation to protect civilians from the effects of armed conflict.

I am deeply alarmed by the disturbing developments in and around Aleppo city. Hundreds of mortars, missiles and projectiles were launched on both eastern and western Aleppo in past weeks, resulting in scores of deaths and hundreds of injuries. Since 7 July, civilian, humanitarian and commercial movements in and out of eastern Aleppo City have come to a halt. Castello Road, the last remaining access route in and out of the east of the city, as I alerted the Council in my two previous briefings, where an estimated 250,000 to 275,000 people reside, has now been cut off due to the fighting.

The United Nations and our partners prepositioned stocks in sad but all too real anticipation of such developments, and food in east Aleppo is expected to run out by the middle of next month. While medical supplies are available for a longer period, I am extremely worried about the continuing attacks on medical facilities in eastern Aleppo, such as that on a hospital in Alma'adi neighbourhood, which has now been hit three times in the last month alone.

Indeed, over the last 48 hours, we have received reports, which are in the process of being verified, of attacks on or near several facilities in Aleppo City and in the countryside. Such attacks have a devastating multiplier effect — not only killing people and destroying facilities, but leaving thousands unable to get even basic care at a time when they need it most.

I cannot stress enough how critical the situation is for those trapped in eastern Aleppo city. That population is at serious risk of besiegement as the fighting closes in and their access to basic necessities runs out. Our highest priority is to ensure access through both cross-line or cross-border operations, under the existing

resolutions of the Security Council, so that we can replenish stocks and ensure people's access to the basic necessities of life. The international community simply cannot let eastern Aleppo city become yet another, and by far the largest, besieged area. This is medieval and shameful. We must not allow this to happen, but the clock is ticking. I urgently call upon the parties and those with influence to act now to establish a weekly, 48-hour humanitarian pause for eastern Aleppo city so that the United Nations and partners have safe, regular and sustained access to the quarter of a million people trapped behind the front lines. This must be a full United Nations call — not just from me as the United Nations humanitarian chief — it must come from the Security Council.

I am equally alarmed by reports of deteriorating humanitarian conditions and urgent medical evacuation needs in Madaya, Fo'ah, Zabadani and Kefraya, where more than 62,000 people are and continue to be besieged. Despite the approvals granted by the Government of Syria over the past three months for the United Nations and humanitarian partners to provide assistance to besieged civilians in the four towns, the United Nations and partners have not been able to access the towns because of tension among parties to the agreement, heavy aerial bombardment in Idlib and shelling on Fo'ah and Kefraya. We should all remember the disturbing images of starving children in Madaya earlier this year, many of whom died even after aid was finally allowed in. Let me be clear: we will see such images again unless the parties enable immediate and unconditional humanitarian deliveries to the four towns. This is no hollow warning; this is highly likely to occur again unless the Council enforces access.

Urgent medical evacuations must also be immediately available where needed. The current tit-for-tat arrangement, which has led to children dying in one of the towns because there is no equally sick child in another location to evacuate at exactly the same time, should be a shameful blot on the conscience of the parties and those who support them. In any event, such a callous tit-for-tat arrangement is not in compliance with international humanitarian law. The only measure for humanitarian access and action is to meet needs, not reciprocity. I call on all parties to allow the sick and wounded to exit the four towns and all other besieged areas to get the medical care they need to survive, and put an end to the tit-for-tat approach. Medical evacuations are not a question of politics or military advantage, but of basic humanity.

I have highlighted Aleppo city and the four towns today, but members will find similar conditions in many more places: the tens of thousands trapped and exposed to fighting in Menbij with no humanitarian support; or the reports of dozens of civilians killed in strikes in Tokhar, in rural Aleppo; the continued bombardment of Douma, Darayya and Khan El-Shieh, in rural Damascus; and relentless attacks by the Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant on the besieged parts of Deir ez-Zor city. I am also gravely concerned about the situation at the berm along the Jordanian border, where the number of people seeking shelter from the fighting inside Syria increased exponentially in recent months. The vast majority of those stranded are children, women and elderly people, as well as those in need of medical care, including hundreds of pregnant women. It is baking hot, totally arid — a no-man's land of a barely living hell.

The fact is that across Syria approximately 5.5 million people are in need in hard-to-reach and besieged areas with little physical protection and limited access to basic life-saving assistance. Of that number, some 590,000 people remain totally trapped in besieged areas. If I may, let me take a moment to describe what it is actually like to live in those areas.

Most of those people are completely desperate for an escape from the constant fighting, shelling and snipers that engulf their lives. Parents have no food for their near-starving children. Malnutrition is so severe that children die as a result. There is no running water or electricity. Prices for the little commodities that reach those areas are dozens of times higher than in neighbouring communities, and thus simply not affordable for those already reduced to nothing. They are places with little education, and where sexual violence, child recruitment and early marriage are commonplace. Imagine a place where a pregnant woman cannot give birth safely because she cannot receive the necessary painkillers or the care that is needed. They are places where those fortunate enough to find care all too often die in their beds when their medical facility is hit. And yes, in Syria, there are unspeakable sexual crimes against children — it is abhorrent and on our collective watch.

When you look beyond the numbers, Mr. President, that is the reality that people are facing in those areas

day in and day out. It is not the fighters or those at checkpoints who are suffering and dying in such ways. It is the civilian population, the most vulnerable, children, women, disabled persons and the elderly. Those are indisputable facts, and they speak for themselves. Surely none of us, no one here, is immune to those horrors, which constitute daily life for so many of our fellow human beings who just happen to have been Syrian in Syria when their world exploded around them over five years ago.

The life-or-death situation in many parts of the country is exactly why we press from every possible angle to get regular and sustained access to all besieged and hard-to-reach areas. It is true that some progress has been made this year. Overall, we have now reached over 1 million people in besieged and hard-to-reach areas. We have reached each besieged area at least once this year, including 400,000 of the 590,000 people, including as well through ongoing airdrops to 110,000 people in Deir ez-Zor city. Significant progress was made on approvals by the Government of Syria for the July inter-agency convoy plan, with 34 out of 35 locations approved for convoys, including, for the first time, all requested besieged areas with the full package of assistance. Those breakthroughs, however incremental, are proof that, when there is enough political will, it is really possible to reach people in desperate need of life-saving assistance. I thank those with influence on the parties for bringing their weight to bear on the issue, especially recent initiatives by the United States and the Russian Federation, not least the Russian Federation's Ambassador and his team in Damascus.

At the same time, we have to recognize the enormous access challenges still in front of us. The escalation of fighting and insecurity continues to further constrain access. Beyond Aleppo and the four towns, we have seen that very clearly in July, as even with Government of Syria approvals we have been unable to reach many other locations, such as Darayya and Duma, due to bombing and shelling and fighting along key access roads. The United Nations and partner cross-border operations from Turkey and Jordan have also been affected by insecurity along border areas and key access routes, thus affecting our ability to reach tens of thousands of people.

Arbitrary restrictions and obstructions continue to limit or obstruct where we deliver aid, to whom and how often. Notwithstanding the high level of approvals for the July inter-agency convoy plan, the Syrian authorities only authorized us to deliver to 75 per cent of the population estimated by the United Nations to be in those areas. The team on the ground continues to press for the delivery of aid based on independent United Nations needs assessments, as called for by the Security Council in its resolutions

Even when approvals are granted and the large amount of paperwork is completed, permits given by the Government centrally do not always translate down to their security forces. In particular, despite repeated calls for the free passage of all medicines and surgical equipment in aid convoys, from the Council and others, medical and surgical items continue to be excluded or removed from midwifery kits, paediatric kits, and diarrheal-disease sets, depriving thousands of people each month — I repeat: midwifery kits, paediatric kits, and diarrheal-disease sets. This deliberate denial of essential medicine and surgical equipment undermines the very basis of humanitarian action. Meanwhile, some non-State armed groups have also attacked, threatened and refused to cooperate with humanitarian workers. And sustained United Nations access to areas under the control of ISIL, such as parts of the Raqqah and Deir ez-Zor governorates, remains extremely limited.

Throughout Syria, United Nations agencies and partners from non-governmental organizations continue their tireless efforts to meet the urgent humanitarian needs of the Syrian population, often at great personal risk. We saw that first-hand on 29 June, when during a convoy to Irbin and Zamalka, one of the drivers of a supply truck was shot in the chest, and another round struck an armoured vehicle. I would like to recognize the bravery of those who risk their lives every time they cross conflict lines and borders or enter active conflict areas to provide much needed life-saving assistance to those in need and remind those who sometimes carp that gaining the Government of Syria's permission is the only way to mitigate these live and present mortal dangers to our brave United Nations colleagues and their partners, many of them local Syrians. Collectively, through these efforts, we are reaching millions of people per month through regular programming, cross-border and cross-line activities, as well as air operations. It is vital that all humanitarian organizations, personnel and other assets — wherever they are based, wherever they are operating, or however they deliver assistance in Syria — be provided all necessary protection by all

parties to the conflict, as afforded under international humanitarian law.

Let me be frank — we need to urgently regain the momentum on protection and access. The momentum created in the first half of the year and since the creation of the International Syria Support Group's humanitarian task force must be the platform for a step change in the protection and access situation for civilians into the second half of this year. That must include, first, a restoration and consolidation of the cessation of hostilities and an end to indiscriminate attacks that recklessly kill and injure civilians. It is well within the power of all parties and those who back them to minimize civilian casualties and avoid further crimes and atrocities. They must do so. Civilians and civilian infrastructure are not pawns to be sacrificed, but are specially protected under international law.

Secondly, it must include all necessary action from the parties and their supporters to ensure safe, sustained, unhindered and unconditional access. That must include humanitarian truces and pauses in the fighting, so that we can reach those civilians trapped behind the front lines and that they can reach life-saving services not available in their areas. Better still, of course, is for all the fighting to stop.

Thirdly, it must include an immediate end to the sieges that still collectively punish hundreds of thousands of civilians mercilessly. Anything less than the full lifting of the sieges will never be enough, and we cannot pretend otherwise.

I will close by repeating what I and my colleagues have said many times. The crisis must end with a political solution, not a military victory. But we should make no mistake as to the current humanitarian trajectory; despite some sentiment and even rhetoric within the international community, the available protection space is shrinking, humanitarian conditions are worsening and the level of despair is rising. Those cannot and must not become accepted trends to which the international community seemingly resigns itself as the search for a political solution continues. The international community has shown unity of purpose before and must show it again before it is too late and we face the prospect of losing another generation of Syrians to conflict and misery.

The President: I thank Mr. O'Brien for his briefing.

I shall now give the floor to the members of the Council.

Mr. Rycroft (United Kingdom): I thank you, Sir, for agreeing to hold this meeting in open session today. Enough is enough. We need to break with tradition and have this debate in public because it is vital that the world hear the reality of life in Syria. I therefore thank Under-Secretary O'Brien for his sobering briefing.

It is also vital that the world hear each and every member of the Council respond to the horrors described today. We cannot hide away behind closed doors. We cannot stay silent in the face of such barbarism. Hundreds of civilians are being killed and injured in attacks from the air and ground. Hundreds of thousands more are now suffering in an ever-expanding humanitarian crisis. As we have just heard, eastern Aleppo city is now encircled by the regime. The Castillo road, a vital route for food, medicine and supplies, is cut off. Three hundred thousand people are now effectively besieged. Yet another humanitarian catastrophe awaits.

We have seen this before, and we know what happens next. Only six months ago, we held an emergency briefing on the siege of Madaya (see PV.7605). We all remember the pictures of emaciated children from that town — children like Olah, only 12-years-old, who died after the regime ignored requests to evacuate her. She starved to death. The Syrian American Medical Society reports that 64 others suffered the same horrific fate.

We owe it to Olah, her family and the people of Madaya to stop history repeating itself in Aleppo. There are 300,000 reasons why we cannot afford to fail, but we are running out of time. We welcome the foresight of the United Nations to preposition food supplies in the city, but those supplies will feed less than half the city's population and only for a month. Food prices are soaring, the price of flour has doubled, the price of vegetables has tripled and it is only going to get worse. We all know what is needed: sustained and unhindered humanitarian deliveries. All of us here today — the Council, the United Nations, the world outside the Chamber — must keep pressing for such access, both for Aleppo and all other destinations agreed in the July plan.

We support Under-Secretary O'Brien's call for a weekly 48-hour pause to allow aid into Aleppo, and I call upon all other Council members to express their support today. We again call on Russia to use its influence on the regime, not just to reopen the Castillo

road and other routes, but also to respect fully the cessation of hostilities, so that convoys can proceed securely and Syrians can live safely. Those are not unreasonable requests. They are not even new requests, and yet they have fallen on deaf ears time after time and week after week. Without sustained and unhindered land access, we must continue to push for air access, and we look to the World Food Programme and the United Nations for an update on their plans to request approval for such delivery.

So far this month, only two besieged places have been reached by the United Nations. The report of the Secretary-General (S/2016/631) explains that that is because of security concerns. That comes as no surprise, given the regime's military offensives. It is also because of administrative delays. I am sorry, but no person or child should ever face starvation because of an administrative delay. The Council should therefore be united in its condemnation of any effort to delay or restrict access. As the Secretary-General's report makes clear, granting access should never be conditional, dependent on political negotiations or used as a bargaining chip in talks.

As crucial as humanitarian access is for the people of Aleppo, Madaya and so many other places in Syria, it will count for very little if the bombs keep falling. I was e-mailed recently by Dr. Hatem, a Syrian paediatrician, who I have quoted in the Chamber before. He wrote to me:

> "There are close to 90,000 children in Aleppo. In front of each of them, now lies the siege and above them the threat of bombs".

What good is it to feed, to clothe, to heal someone only for them to die under the rubble of a bomb blast? In Daraya, over 700 barrel bombs fell in less than three weeks. That is on average 1 bomb every 40 minutes for 20 days. In Aleppo city, only this weekend, 6 medical facilities were attacked within the space of 24 hours. The only paediatric facility in east Aleppo was hit twice within 12 hours. These are just a handful of examples; there are many more. Such attacks are unconscionable. They are unjustifiable. And yet they are commonplace. Al-Assad's consistent disregard for the cessation of hostilities is an affront to the Security Council and to the International Syria Support Group.

In the coming weeks and days, therefore, it is not enough to grant unhindered access to all besieged areas. It is not enough to unblock Castello road. We need to see all of that and more, including a genuine recommitment to the cessation of hostilities, an end to the bombing of medical facilities and an end to attacks on civilians. That is the only way to save the people of Aleppo and the people of Syria. As Doctor Yahya of the Aleppo Children's Hospital told me by e-mail earlier today, if nothing is done, we are surely facing death.

Mr. Delattre (France) (*spoke in French*): Last February, the adoption of the cessation of hostilities agreement provided a spark of hope for a reduction in violence that would open the way to an emergence from the crisis and to the negotiation of a political transition in Syria. Two months later, at the end of April, the regime, supported by its allies, began its attack on Aleppo and extinguished that hope. At that time, France, together with the United Kingdom, took the initiative to bring the Security Council together on 4 May (see S/PV.7687) to denounce the tragic situation being faced by Aleppo and the hundreds of thousands of inhabitants who were still living there.

The regime, with the complicity of its allies, had just launched an offensive that sounded the death knell for a cessation of hostilities. The agreement on the cessation of hostilities, as we feared, was just a smoke screen to hide with the utmost cynicism an exclusively military strategy, which aimed, under the pretext of combating the Al-Nusra Front, to encircle all the areas held by the opposition. What the regime cannot control, it seeks to destroy. Hospitals were destroyed just yesterday in Aleppo, in total violation of international humanitarian law and resolution 2286 (2016), which we adopted by consensus a few weeks ago.

During this entire time, the regime has continued to violate Security Council resolutions, international humanitarian law and the most basic humanitarian principles. It has continued to attack civilian populations and non-terrorist armed groups. By observing and supporting the regime's attitude, some members of the Security Council are jeopardizing their responsibility and their credibility.

The brutality has continued to worsen in Aleppo city and province. After experiencing indiscriminate attacks and daily barrel bomb attacks, the city of Aleppo is now being besieged. The Castello road, which was the last accessible route to provide it with water, provisions and medicines, has been cut off by the regime's allied forces. In many respects Aleppo is for Syria what Sarajevo was for Bosnia. It is a crossroads

city, a martyred city. The symbolic crossroads city of Aleppo, which is thousands of years old and is part of humankind's heritage, is a place where many countries have clashed and intermingled, leaving profound and diverse imprints on the city — again, today is a martyred town. This symbol of civilization is now being subjected to a medieval type of siege. What a downfall and, frankly, what a disgrace that is.

There are still about 300,000 people living in besieged Aleppo, soon to be deprived of everything and at the mercy of the cruelty of the regime's militia. Therefore, I ask: Can the Security Council, 20 years after the siege of Sarajevo, passively accept the reprise of a war crime of such barbarous tactics? Those responsible for those crimes must not go unpunished.

The calendar provided for by resolution 2254 (2015) sets 1 August as the deadline for establishing a transitional authority with full executive powers. For the Security Council, respecting that deadline is a test of the real will of the regime and its supporters to reach a political solution.

At our most recent consultations, Special Envoy De Mistura collectively informed us of the fact that, without any progress in the cessation of hostilities and the humanitarian situation, no credible resumption of the negotiations would be possible. As we now meet, this tragic scenario is indeed emerging. Aleppo has become Syria's martyred city. If it is besieged enough, it could become the graveyard of the Vienna process, as there will be no lasting political solution or effective combating of terrorism, while Syrian civilians continue to be massacred.

As was stressed publicly by the French Minister for Foreign Affairs, Mr. Jean-Marc Ayrault, France cannot close its eyes to the tragedy taking place in Aleppo. We cannot allow the Aleppo siege to continue without responding. Therefore, France has three demands.

First of all, we formally call upon the allies of the regime, the members of the Security Council and the International Syria Support Group (ISSG) to assume their responsibilities so that the Syrian regime and its allies immediately stop their attacks on Aleppo. The lives of dozens of thousands of people and the future of a negotiated political solution, as well as the shared fundamental values of the Organization, are at stake.

Secondly, to relieve the suffering of the population, we call upon for the immediate establishment of a humanitarian ceasefire in Aleppo and Ghouta.

Thirdly, we call for an immediate lifting of all the sieges and for rapid, safe and unhindered access to all people in Syria, pursuant to the obligations under resolutions 2139 (2015), 2185 (2014), 2254 (2015) and 2268 (2016). The Syrian authorities must respect their obligations under international humanitarian law, and they must also abide by Security Council resolutions.

The ISSG mechanism; the Geneva task force; the efforts of Mr. De Mistura, which we support; and the appeals for bringing together the opposition will all achieve nothing because of the Aleppo siege. Let us be clear: there will be no possible cooperation with those who are responsible for this crime while it is being committed and they bear a heavy responsibilty in the face of history.

Mr. Bermúdez (Uruguay) (*spoke in Spanish*): I thank Under-Secretary-General Stephen O'Brien for his briefing.

At our most recent open debate (see S/PV.7740), my delegation spoke about working methods. We said that it was positive if Security Council members were to begin to express themselves in this open forum, rather than doing so only in closed consultations when the format of the meetings involved briefings followed by consultations. For that reason, we would like to make just a brief statement at this stage.

We are concerned about the lack of a solution to the grave humanitarian situation in Syria, which affects millions of people who are suffering from destruction, hunger and extreme violence. Cruel practices, which represent war crimes, such as the use of hunger as a war tactic, are taking place in Syria. This deplorable tactic is being used by parties to the conflict to inflict hunger on the millions of besieged people, including children.

The besieging of towns as a tactic of war continues to be one of the situations that should most urgently draw the attention of the Security Council, as it does not affect just the lives of people living under extreme conditions because of the lack of food, but also because it results in a lack of access to medicines and all the basic supplies necessary to meet their most basic needs.

Uruguay is concerned about the recent events that have taken place in the east of Aleppo city and the closing of the Castello road, which was the last

remaining access route to that area, the closing of which prevents the circulation of civilians, trade and humanitarian aid. Recently, Council members heard about improvements in the delivery of humanitarian aid in certain besieged cities, including some that had not received aid in years. However, at the same time, we learned with shock and horror the news of the bombings that occurred in those same cities immediately after the arrival of aid, as was the case in Daraya. The ongoing deliberate attacks perpetrated against hospitals where health-care personnel have been the victims is worrying; this situation calls for compliance with resolution 2286 (2016) adopted by the Council last May. Today, we have received information about new bombings in Aleppo that have caused civilian deaths as well as the destruction of hospitals, including a blood bank.

The humanitarian crisis in Syria can also be seen through the displacement of millions of people trying to escape the horror. The extreme seriousness of their situation is causing these people's extreme vulnerability, whether they be internally displaced by lack of access to a minimum standard of living or those who manage to flee the country only to become easy prey for organized crime.

The situation of children in Syria is extremely worrying. The effects of conflict on children is compromising the future of an entire generation. According to recent data from UNICEF, more than 8 out of 10 Syrian children — more than 8 million — have been affected by war and are in need of humanitarian assistance, including those within Syria and those who are refugees in neighbouring countries, namely, Lebanon, Jordan, Iraq, Turkey and Egypt.

In addition, one in three children in the country — approximately 3.7 million in total — has been born since the conflict began, with the result that they know only violence, fear and displacement. In this context of despair and chaos, Uruguay considers it necessary to redouble international efforts to prevent Syrian children from becoming a lost generation as a result, inter alia, of the lack of educational opportunities, child-soldier recruitment and forced marriages at an early age.

Accordingly, the recent and terrible case of beheading of a Palestinian boy by the Nour Al-Din Al-Zenki group is a barbaric and cowardly act. How far have we come? Is it no longer enough to recruit children? Do they also have to cut their heads off with knives? Uruguay rejects and expresses its strong condemnation of this savage act. We would add, further, that there is no God or religion that accepts an atrocity of this nature.

We support Mr. Stephen O'Brien's request for a weekly 48-hour truce in Aleppo.

Finally, Uruguay wishes to reiterate once again the importance of making greater progress towards a political solution that facilitates moving forward in the peace talks under way and which supports a process of transition. We are convinced that this is the only way to achieve lasting solutions to the current conflict, taking into account the provisions of resolutions 2254 (2015) and 2268 (2016) of this Council.

Mr. Yelchenko (Ukraine): To say the least, the humanitarian situation in Syria remains of grave concern to us. The regime and its allies continue to pursue their own military objectives with complete and cynical disregard for the still-existing cessation of hostilities and their obligations under the May statement of the International Syria Support Group, to which no one seems to pay any attention any longer. Damascus has made no effort to save the political momentum but instead is keeping the Syrian people hostage to its plans to change the equation on the ground by military means.

We are alarmed by the dozens of deaths and hundreds of injured as a result of a systematic shelling by the pro-regime forces and its allies in both eastern and western Aleppo in the past weeks. As the head of delegation of the International Committee of the Red Cross in Syria recently said, the situation in Aleppo is devastating, with the city being constantly bombed. We share concern that civilians on all sides are unable to find shelter, food and medical care. We call on all sides to the conflict to protect civilians and civilian infrastructure.

In a number of meetings we have raised the issue of the situation along the Castello road. Now the fears that we expressed have become a reality. Food supplies in eastern Aleppo are sufficient only until the end of July, and health care is not available. A humanitarian catastrophe is looming for some 300,000 people. Humanitarian access to eastern Aleppo city must be restored without any delay or preconditions.

Assessing the state of implementation of the July plan for cross-line deliveries, we stress again the importance of observing the principle of no conditions attached with

regard to the type of assistance to be provided. We are dismayed by the fact that in almost half of the locations the Syrian authorities have allowed lower numbers of beneficiaries to receive the humanitarian aid than the United Nations had projected. In this context, we join the United Nations and other colleagues in calling on all parties to the conflict to immediately provide unconditional, unimpeded and sustained access to the people in besieged and hard-to-reach areas across Syria, or at least to agree to the establishment of the weekly 48-hour humanitarian pause.

An improved humanitarian situation can only be achieved through the political resolution of the conflict. However, as we are less than a week away from the 1 August target date, we unfortunately do not see any positive changes that could lead to the resumption of the negotiation process. Without tangible progress on the political track, the best we and the Syrian people can hope for is reliance on irregular and interrupted deliveries of humanitarian aid by the United Nations and other actors, which is rather dismaying after all the efforts devoted to alleviating the suffering of the Syrian people.

We need to ask ourselves how many more briefings like today's we will have to hear before it is too late.

Mr. Aboulatta (Egypt) (*spoke in Arabic*): In the five years since the beginning of the conflict in Syria and its consequences, caused in part by the involvement of outside parties, the country has suffered immeasurably and the international community has been unable to end the carnage, which cannot be achieved until reconciliation takes place. The parties are not interested in Syria itself, which has become fertile soil for terrorist groups and foreign terrorist fighters coming from various countries around the world, thereby making it fertile soil for chaos and sectarianism.

We have seen the Secretary-General's recent report on the humanitarian situation in Syria (S/2016/631). Despite the relative progress that has been achieved towards ensuring the access of humanitarian aid since the beginning of the work of the International Syria Support Group, so far we have only seen the military zones and targets increase and the number of external players involved, including those taking part in military activities, expand. Unfortunately, innocent victims are still dying in Syria. Furthermore, some people are using the unprecedented humanitarian crisis to achieve their own political goals.

For its part, Egypt has made efforts and concentrated on the process of ensuring humanitarian access, and we have achieved some progress in that regard.

We have sent a complete convoy to a number of towns, including Damascus, Dara', Qunaytirah and Suwayda', and we will persist in our efforts. We call upon the members of the Security Council and the international community to focus on providing whatever support it can to the Syrian people on the ground without politicizing or trading on the humanitarian crisis in Syria.

Only a political solution will effectively put an end to the suffering of the Syrian people. We are all aware that the only formula for such a solution is the one agreed by the international community, as set out in various resolutions, including resolutions 2254 (2015) and 2268 (2016) on the cessation of hostilities in Syria. In that regard, I recall that this solution represents our final opportunity to put an end to the Syrian conflict. In a constantly evolving international political situation, there is little time left, and what is possible today might turn into a missed opportunity tomorrow.

Allow me to reiterate that the current international consensus is based on a number of pillars. First, a cessation of hostilities in Syria is a prerequisite for establishing a complete ceasefire in the country. Secondly, a political transition must be attained through negotiations between the Syrian Government and the broadest possible spectrum of opposition groups, pursuant to resolution 2254 (2015) and the Geneva communiqué (S/2012/523, annex). Thirdly, we must work to improve the humanitarian situation and deliver humanitarian assistance to those in need of it in Syria, including in the besieged areas. Fourthly, we must combat the terrorism and extremism that run rampant in Syria. In the coming period, implementing those pillars will depend primarily on the international community's determination to put an end to the crisis and to comply with those agreements. It will also depend on the International Syrian Support Group's efforts to ensure that those measures are implemented.

In that context, I reiterate Egypt's support for the cooperation and coordination between the Russian Federation and the United States as co-chairs of the International Syria Support Group. We welcome their tireless efforts at the political level and in terms of ensuring humanitarian access in Syria. I once again call on them to promptly agree on how to address the

situation on the ground, including by strengthening the implementation of the cessation of hostilities and preventing terrorist organizations and those groups affiliated with them from sabotaging it. Furthermore, they should push for the launch of direct negotiations between the Syrian parties as soon as possible, under the auspices of Special Envoy Staffan de Mistura.

Despite the fact that the terrorist groups are clearly not parties to the ceasefire in Syria, we note that there has been an incomprehensible hesitation and politicization in dealing with those groups. That has led some armed groups to collaborate openly with terrorist organizations, particularly the Al-Nusra Front — the Syrian branch of Al-Qaida. We believe that such a brazen challenge to the international community can no longer be tolerated. In that connection, we call on the international community to set a timetable for including those groups on the list of terrorist organizations should they continue to cooperate with the Al-Nusra Front. Continuing to show complacency and turn a blind eye will only serve to encourage terrorism. Terrorist fighters who belong to so-called moderate groups have begun to emulate the beastly and sick acts perpetrated by Da'esh. They recently filmed the beheading of a child and posted the footage on social media.

In closing, allow me to call on and plead with all domestic, regional and international parties in Syria, on behalf of the Egyptian and Arab peoples, to have mercy and spare the Syrian people from the consequences of their score-settling and narrow political interests, and to be willing to compromise, if only partly, on those interests in order to show mercy and compassion to the innocent mothers and children of Syria who have committed no political sins.

Mr. Van Bohemen (New Zealand): I thank Stephen O'Brien for his briefing. As Stephen O'Brien has described, the humanitarian situation in Syria is devastating. The numbers verge on incomprehensible, although we know that for Syrians, their ordeal is all too real. And as Mr. O'Brien has confirmed, despite the improvements that had been made in recent months in respect of access, the overall humanitarian situation is worse. This humanitarian catastrophe is not just a product of indifference by the parties and their backers to the suffering of the Syrian people; in many cases, it is deliberate, and humanitarian access is manipulated for military advantage. Hospitals are routinely targeted. The fight against terrorism is used to justify indiscriminate attacks on civilians and any group that opposes the regime.

It is completely unacceptable that siege and starvation continue to be employed as methods of warfare. The recent closure of Castello road is particularly concerning, putting up to 300,000 more civilians in eastern Aleppo at risk of starvation. In this regard, we fully endorse Stephen O'Brien's call for a 48-hour humanitarian pause in and around Aleppo. It is also unacceptable that civilian neighbourhoods are being shelled and medical facilities bombed. In many cases, it appears they are deliberately targeted, in blatant violation of international law and resolution 2286 (2016). As we have heard, five medical clinics were hit in Aleppo province on 24 July alone. The growing humanitarian situation on the Jordan-Syria border is also of great concern. Over 100,000 people are now in need of ongoing assistance. It is a bleak picture, bleaker still because every bomb and blockade takes us farther away from the political solution to this brutal conflict.

There has been progress. We acknowledge Syria's positive response to the United Nations June and July plans. We welcome the efforts of the United States and Russia, as humanitarian co-chairs of the International Syria Support Group, to get aid to the people who need it. We acknowledge the extensive effort that Russia has been making on the ground to facilitate access and to ensure that agreements made by the Syrian regime are kept. While the level of approvals in July represents a slight improvement, it still provides for assistance to less than 50 per cent of Syrians in need, and that is if all the aid gets through, which it regularly does not.

Too often, we see the Syrian Government using administrative obstacles to block humanitarian access. We agree with the Secretary-General that humanitarian access must not be a one-off or occasional event. It cannot be limited to particular segments of the population or to specific kinds of aid. It is not a favour or a bargaining chip for negotiations — it is an obligation under international law. There are 5.47 million people living in besieged, hard-to-reach and priority cross-line locations. Providing intermittent, symbolic access to a few of these areas each month is not enough. We call on the Syrian Government to fully implement the July plan based on the needs assessment conducted by the United Nations. The continued removal of certain items, including medical supplies, is unacceptable. What possible justification can there be for removing

paediatric kits and diarrhoeal disease sets from convoys?

We also call on all parties to the conflict to take all feasible measures to protect civilians, as required under international humanitarian law and reaffirmed in various Council resolutions including resolution 2258 (2015) in order to safeguard the lives of all civilians living in Aleppo and elsewhere in Syria. We all need to pressure the parties and their backers to prioritize ending the suffering of the Syrian people over their own narrow aims. This means getting the cessation of hostilities back on track, ending the brutal and cynical attacks on civilians and hospitals, and getting humanitarian assistance to the millions who need it. Tangible improvements on the ground are a humanitarian imperative. They can also help create the space and momentum needed for a successful resumption of intra-Syrian talks and progress towards the sustainable political resolution to this conflict that the Syrian people so desperately need.

Mr. Oyarzun Marchesi (Spain) (*spoke in Spanish*): I am largely in agreement with the statements of the Ambassadors of Egypt and New Zealand.

I thank Mr. O'Brien. After listening to his briefing on behalf of the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, we note once again that the hell that is the war in Syria has no limits. The glimmer of hope we saw late last year is on the brink of being extinguished. There is a pressing need to restore a cessation of hostilities throughout the country. We thank the United States and the Russian Federation for their efforts to revitalize resolution 2268 (2016). We trust that they will bear fruit in the coming days and that this meeting will have a positive effect on the tragedy befalling the Syrian people.

Only five months ago, we were taking the first steps to isolate the terrorist groups in Syria and thereby normalize the lives of its civilians. Humanitarian access was improving. Up to 1 million people have received assistance in 2016. Nevertheless, today we are witnessing an escalation in fighting that could jeopardize all the gains we have achieved. Often, attacks are carried out without the slightest regard for the basic tenets of international humanitarian law.

It is unconscionable that there have been 40 attacks on hospitals and clinics in Syria so far this year, according to the World Health Organization. The latest was on the Omar bin Abdulaziz hospital in Aleppo. No less tragic is the fact that the Syrian regime is removing medical supplies from the convoys, despite pressure from the international community and the Russian Federation. I cannot say it often enough — this is unacceptable.

We continue to receive reports of barrel-bomb attacks in urban zones. As the Deputy Ambassador of Uruguay so aptly said, the abduction and subsequent decapitation of a child in Aleppo, as captured in a video that was circulated on social media last week, is absolutely inhuman. The child was only 11 years old, and the most savage brutality imaginable ended his life.

Finally, I want to mention a worker from the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East — a Palestinian by the name of Yaser Mahmoud Shuaeeb — who lost his life on 17 July, also in Aleppo, as he was driving a humanitarian convoy. I reiterate the pressing need for a cessation of hostilities. Meanwhile, we urge all parties to the conflict to respect international law, which mandates the protection of civilians. Specifically, we wish to highlight two essential actions that must be implemented immediately.

First, we call for humanitarian pauses in the fighting, with a view to facilitating humanitarian access, including food distribution, and simultaneously allowing for the most urgent medical evacuations. With regard to Aleppo, I welcome Stephen O'Brien's proposal to establish weekly 48-hour pauses in the fighting. I also fully align myself with the three proposals made by the French Ambassador. Secondly, we call for a clarification of the state of the access route to east Aleppo, the so-called Ca. According to the Secretary-General's report (S/2016/631), the lives of between 200,000 and 300,000 people depend on that route, which has been unusable since 17 July.

Mr. Churkin (Russian Federation) (*spoke in Russian*): The multi-year conflict eroding Syria today, due to terrorists fuelled with weapons from the outside, violations and flows of internally displaced persons and refugees, has seen a deterioration in the humanitarian situation in Syria. At the same time, following the establishment of the ceasefire regime, we have seen some progress. Humanitarian access has increased significantly and difficulties are being discussed in the special format of the International Syria Support Group.

The Government of Damascus is doing a great deal to ensure that, in such a difficult context of internal armed conflict, its citizens can enjoy a normal life. As a result of the unrelenting work of Russian specialists based in Hmeimim, the number of residential areas participating in the ceasefire is now 209. More than 60 armed opposition movements have stated their intention to implement the ceasefire regime. There are ongoing talks with armed militias about extending the ceasefire to the governorates of Daraa, As-Suwayda and Homs. Russia is providing humanitarian assistance to Syrians through both the State and civil society. In this regard, we stress the need to establish a sound process for the return of internally displaced persons to reconciled regions and to rebuild public infrastructure there.

The priority format for humanitarian operations remains by land, with the direct agreement of the Syrian Government. As a last resort, airdrops could be used. Air delivery has become a lifesaver for hundreds of thousands in Deir ez-Zor, besieged by the Islamic State in Iraq and the Sham. Humanitarian supplies are dropped with the active participation of Russian forces. This has been effective for the provision of assistance to those in Al-Hasakah, and we can therefore only welcome the opening of the air bridge in Qamishli. However, let us not forget that the situation arises from the fact that Turkey has been blocking the crossing point from Nusaybin for several months now. We hope that Ankara will make the right decision to alleviate the suffering of Syrian civilians.

We call on the United States, the United Kingdom and other allies of Turkey and the North Atlantic Treaty Organization to provide Turkey with the necessary assistance. I recall that when we discussed the opening of the crossing point to Damascus, our Western partners imposed preconditions or linkages almost every day. We stress that it is unacceptable for fighters to use civilians as human shields. It is well known that opponents of the Syrian Government often use this tactic, trapping people in blocked-off residential areas.

We do not question the need for humanitarian assistance, including in besieged areas. However, we believe that the Government of Syria's military operations to block and destroy terrorists aim to reinstate law and order. In a number of cases, as a result of such actions, fighters terrorizing locals have signalled their readiness to lay down arms.

We are deeply worried about information that, as a consequence of strikes led by the United States coalition in the area of Manbij, in the north of the country, dozens of people, including women and children, have been killed and injured in camps. We are struck by the fact that not a single word has been said about this incident in the statements made by the representatives of the United Kingdom, France and other participants in the coalition. We hope that this incident will be discussed in detail by the representative of the United States, who will take the floor after us. We do not need promises of investigations. We have been waiting five years for an investigation into civilian bombing victims in Libya, but we still have not heard a word about that either. I am therefore sure that United States military knows how the situation stands now.

The news of the atrocious attack on a Palestinian boy, beheaded by bandits from the Harakat Nour al-Din al-Zenki, was heart-wrenching. Some have supported this armed group and its cronies in Syria, calling them moderate opposition members, including them in the ceasefire regime, and by any and all means protecting the group from due payback. It is high time for the Security Council to add to the list of terrorists wreaking havoc in Syria.

As a result of the intensified actions carried out over the ceasefire period by Jabhat Al-Nusra and its allies, the situation in Aleppo remains urgent. Terrorists use the ceasefire regime to receive reinforcement from abroad, resupply and mobilize fresh forces, including through the recruitment of minors. As in other besieged areas, the fighters entrenched there are regularly provided with military assistance. The Castello Road is no exception; we have information to the effect that this route is actively being used not for the provision of humanitarian assistance to civilians, but to provide terrorists with weapons and armaments, as well as for the passage of jihad-mobiles with suicide bombers. We also know that those in eastern areas of Aleppo can easily move by day to the western part of the city, where the situation is significantly better. Of course, however the situation might be in Aleppo, there is a need to prevent a humanitarian disaster there.

Just a few words on Darayya: fighters holed up there are carrying out broad artillery strikes, making the provision of humanitarian assistance impossible. At the same time, the supplies that do get there are flowing into the markets of eastern Ghouta. These types of commercial arrangements have characterized

extremist-controlled areas. Our delegation has always spoken about the futile effect of unilateral sanctions against Damascus. Such measures should be lifted, as they cause suffering to people.

First and foremost, there is a need to lift the ban on the provision of medications and fuel. The intermittent pitting of Security Council members one against the other on the humanitarian dossier, the imposition of new ultimatums on the Government of Syria and calling upon Russia to bring pressure to bear on the Government is counterproductive. We believe instead that people should go to Damascus, establish working contacts and actually do something useful. It is clear that foreign sponsors are not upholding their obligations with respect to working with the opposition. They have primary responsibility for a lack of humanitarian access in terrorist-held areas, first and foremost Fo'ah and Kefraya, where the food situation is extremely difficult. Incessant shelling by jihadists there is killing peaceful resident.

Fighters continue with artillery strikes, and the people suffer. We call upon United Nations staff to carefully discharge their mandate, uphold the sovereignty of Syria, not deviate from the principles of neutrality and impartiality, and work to provide help for all those in need, not just those who are in territories controlled by the opposition. We really cannot shake the impression that the spotlight is being intentionally focused on the provision of humanitarian assistance to those areas where the Government of Syria is carrying out counter-terrorism operations. In certain areas controlled by the Government, where people are just as much in need, humanitarian convoys do not seem to be any special hurry. These double standards must be done away with; all need help without exception and without any artificial linkages with those areas in Syria approved by Damascus.

Tasks have to be realistic and cooperation close with the Syrian Government. There is a need to heed the Government's view, including in the design of supply routes. The justified view of Damascus in ensuring security for humanitarian staff is often not taken into account. This was recently demonstrated by the incident in which a driver from the Syrian Red Crescent sustained injuries in a hastily equipped humanitarian convoy sent by night.

Just a few words on politics: let us stop the foot-dragging and resume United Nations-led Syrian talks. Russia is sparing no effort to bring the sides to a peaceful settlement on the basis of international law. An integral element of this strategy is cooperation with the United States, as co-Chair of the International Syria Support Group, as well as with other partners in this very special format. We hope that all partners will seek to shore up rather than erode achievements.

Ms. Power (United States of America): I thank Under-Secretary-General O'Brien for his briefing and for his special attention to the 250,000 to 275,000 Syrians trapped in eastern Aleppo.

Let us put eastern Aleppo in some context. For years, the Council has called on the Al-Assad regime to end the brutal sieges that have inflicted suffering on hundreds of thousands of Syrians, who have been deprived of the food and medicine needed to survive. The community of Darayya, outside Damascus, besieged by the regime, received no United Nations aid for more than three years. Communities in eastern Ghouta received no United Nations deliveries for more than two years. After long and painful negotiations, negotiations that should never have been necessary in the first place, the United Nations and its partners barely managed to reach Syria's 18 besieged areas this year. Often the United Nations was able to send only a single convoy, and more often than not the Al-Assad regime removed supplies from those convoys before they could reach civilians.

It was actually hard to imagine how Syria's humanitarian situation could get worse, and yet Al-Assad's military advances around Aleppo, undertaken with Russia's support, now threaten to bring the suffering of the Syrian people to a new low. We have spoken repeatedly and in great detail over the past six months about the horrific starvation of Syrians in the besieged areas of Madaya and Darayya. Eastern Aleppo, by comparison, has up to seven times as many people as those trapped in Madaya and up to 75 times as many as in Darayya. Eastern Aleppo is quickly falling victim to the Al-Assad regime's typical pattern of starve-and-surrender tactics. Over the past month the Al-Assad regime flagrantly violated the cessation of hostilities by attacking Aleppo. The regime and its supporters have cut off Castello Road, the only remaining supply route for the more than 250,000 Syrians living in the eastern part of the city, severing their access to food, fuel, medicine, clean water and other essential supplies.

Brave and courageous humanitarian workers such as those Mr. O'Brien described continue to try to deliver medical supplies and aid on smaller roads at great, great risk, but alternative options for delivering humanitarian aid are diminishing rapidly. Airstrikes by the Al-Assad regime and by Russia are making the use of those other roads totally precarious. Russia, as a co-sponsor of the cessation of hostilities, must halt these attacks and persuade the regime to do the same, and they must ensure the reopening of the Castello Road. Russia, the Al-Assad regime and other groups fighting around Aleppo should heed the call of the United Nations for a weekly, 48-hour pause to allow for the delivery of essential supplies.

Look at what people are going through: a doctor, Samer Attar, who recently returned to the United States from volunteering in Aleppo, described the scene in clinics after attacks by the Al-Assad regime: "Patient after patient, non-stop, was wheeled into the small emergency room. I saw mutilated limbs, dismembered bodies, dead children, screaming patients. People literally bleed to death in front of you and there is nothing you can do about it". Imagine being a doctor in that circumstance.

Aleppo's residents are not even safe when they get to a hospital. According to the United Nations, the Omar bin Abdul Aziz hospital in eastern Aleppo has been hit three times since June. Airstrikes reportedly struck yet another hospital in the Jebel Saman district of eastern Aleppo on 19 July, killing at least six civilians and injuring 17, and, as we have heard just in the last 48 hours, we have seen reports that the regime has bombed four more hospitals, including one that cared for children.

Feras Badawi, a journalist in eastern Aleppo, told Human Rights Watch, "We have not seen vegetables in weeks, and airstrikes are not giving us a break". Ibrahim Al-Leith, a volunteer first responder with Syria Civil Defence, described the long lines forming at shops, because "we are really expecting a famine in a few days".

In another deeply alarming development, a video circulated last week that showed rebel fighters beheading a young boy in Aleppo. The brutal killing of this boy, reported to be 12-year-old Abdullah Issa, is appalling. The United States condemns in the strongest terms this unconscionable act as well as the unlawful targeting of children and the use of child soldiers by all parties to this conflict. We note that the opposition has condemned this crime and promised to bring those responsible for his death to justice in a transparent manner, something that we have never heard the Al-Assad regime do when faced with similar allegations of atrocities. Instead, despite countless videos, reams and reams of elaborate photographic evidence and hundreds of thousands of eyewitness reports gathered by credible independent actors, we get from the Syrian regime time and again only blithe, uncurious but always dogmatic denials — a cold, cruel indifference to the fate of the Syrian people.

I would also note that the Russian Federation has never once acknowledged even the possible involvement of the Russian Air Force in the horrific strikes that have resulted in significant civilian casualties, nor has Russia acknowledged the huge number of Russian strikes against opposition groups that signed up for the cessation of hostilities — the very groups, in fact, mentioned by the representative of the Russian Federation. The Russian Federation is in an extremely weak position to point fingers at the United States in the Council. We look forward to Russia opening just a single investigation into strikes that have killed civilians.

The situation in Syria's other besieged areas remains dire. Even excluding Aleppo, 196,500 more Syrians are living in besieged areas than were in January. These Syrians depend on sporadic aid deliveries, which are all too often disrupted by the regime's bureaucratic pretexts or by fighting on the ground. In no single month this year has the United Nations been allowed to reach even half of Syrians living in besieged areas. United Nations Special Adviser Jan Egeland recently warned that Madaya was on the brink of starvation. And the regime continues to dispute the numbers in the United Nations beneficiary list — a cynical attempt to further reduce how much aid gets delivered, in the rare instances that aid gets delivered all. The United Nations should be determining what is needed, how much and where — and not the regime, which has long practiced collective punishment and indiscriminately branded civilians as terrorists.

The regime's actions also continue to take a severe toll on the health sector. This month alone, forces loyal to Al-Assad twice removed medical supplies from convoys bound for the besieged community of Al-Waer in Homs. What exactly did the regime take? It took midwifery kits to help deliver healthy babies and treatments for diarrhoea. It is obscene.

In May, the Security Council unanimously adopted resolution 2286 (2016), which calls for the protection of medical personnel and facilities. Yet hospitals, clinics and medical personnel are still being struck regularly by the regime and Russian forces. In recent days, it was reported that air strikes conducted by the Global Coalition to Counter the Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant may have caused a large number of civilian casualties in Manbij. The United States will carefully and thoroughly review any and all credible information that we can gather about the incident, including information from organizations within Syria that document harm to civilians. We are also now trying to investigate those events. This is a process that is complicated by the extremely limited access of Syrian civil society groups and others to areas controlled by the Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant. We are determined to do whatever we can to understand what took place.

The United States goes to great lengths to reduce the risk of non-combatant casualties, and complies with the law of armed conflict in its operations. It will continue to do so. If we determine that civilians were harmed in Manbij by our strikes, we will acknowledge it and look at what steps can be taken, consistent with the policies that President Obama announced in his executive order of 1 July on pre- and post-strike measures to address civilian casualties in United States operations. This is an extremely important issue.

In conclusion, last week, Secretary Kerry travelled to Moscow in an attempt to address the two main forces undermining the cessation of hostilities — first and foremost, the rampant violations by the Al-Assad regime, including the targeting of both civilians and groups that are supposed to be protected, as well as offensives led by the Al-Qaida affiliate in Syria, the Al-Nusra Front, which increasingly poses a threat to our interests. In Moscow, the United States and Russia agreed on a series of concrete steps that, if fully implemented, could restore the cessation of hostilities and create space for Special Envoy Staffan de Mistura's efforts to launch a genuine political transition process. Our technical experts have been working on the details for implementing such steps. Ultimate success is of course far from assured, but we know that we have a responsibility to try and exhaust all diplomatic options.

Moving forward requires a period of reduced violence. If Aleppo remains under siege, it is hard to see how that is going to work. As we speak, Aleppo's residents are struggling to find food and medicine for their families. Maher Abu al-Walid, a 25-year-old resident, said in an interview, "We are not starving yet, but we are all panicking now". He has to support his wife and 7-month-year-old daughter, Sham, as food supplies are running low and prices are increasing. Imagine for just one moment what it must feel like to realize that, within in a few days, every shelf at your local market will be bare and that you may have no place to go and no way to afford the food that your 7-month-old infant desperately needs. All of us here must do our utmost to ensure that Maher's fear does not become a reality — a reality that far too many in Syria are already enduring.

Mr. Wu Haitao (China) (*spoke in Chinese*): I thank Under-Secretary O'Brien for his briefing.

Conflict has recently intensified in parts of Syria, resulting in civilian casualties, the destruction of medical and relief facilities and the obstruction of United Nations humanitarian relief operations. At the same time, we have also taken note of the fact that humanitarian assistance in Syria over the first six months of this year has yielded some results.

China is very sympathetic to the suffering that the Syrian people have endured over the past five years. We urge the Syrian parties concerned to effectively implement the relevant Security Council resolutions, comprehensively open up humanitarian access, cease hostilities as soon as possible and create the conditions necessary to enable the United Nations to continue to carry out its humanitarian relief programmes. The international community should lend a helping hand and provide assistance to Syria and the neighbouring countries that are taking in refugees, so as to help alleviate the suffering of civilians in besieged and hard-to-reach areas and refugees located outside Syria.

A political solution is the only way out with regard to the situation in Syria. It is also the fundamental way out for a solution to the relevant Syrian issues, including the Syrian humanitarian issue. The international community should be firm and unwavering in undertaking a political solution to the Syrian issue, continue to allow the Syrian people determine the future and fate of Syria, continue to have the United Nations play its primary role in pursuing its good offices, firmly support Special Envoy de Mistura's work, and launch the next round of Geneva talks as soon as possible. All Syrian parties should follow the principle of resolving easier issues first and difficult ones later, take a step-by-step approach, meet each

other half-way, build mutual confidence and gradually find a solution acceptable to all.

China has been actively supporting efforts to ease the Syrian humanitarian situation. Through multiple channels, China has provided numerous forms of humanitarian assistance, including food and supplies, to Syria and other countries in the region. China wishes to work with the international community and continue to contribute to easing the humanitarian crisis in Syria.

Mr. Suárez Moreno (Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela) (*spoke in Spanish*): We thank Mr. O'Brien for his briefing and commend him on his work at the helm of the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs. We also commend his team.

The Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela appreciates the progress made with regard to the humanitarian situation in Syria during the first half of this year, which was acknowledged by the Secretary-General in his latest report (S/2016/631). Accordingly, so far this year, approximately 1 million people have received some form of help from humanitarian agencies. While the situation is not ideal, with constant clashes occurring in numerous parts of Syria, it is a fact that convoys carrying humanitarian aid have reached various areas of the country where their assistance is required — a fact that we see in a positive light.

In that regard, we welcome the recent delivery of humanitarian assistance to the people of Qalaat al-Madiq, which received 40 convoys of aid intended for 32,000 people. In general, we note that there has been real progress in the humanitarian area. However, it has been limited in scope by the delicate situation that the country is undergoing owing to the actions of the Islamic State in Iraq and the Sham (ISIS), the Al-Nusra Front and other armed non-State actors, which have increased activities in some areas of the country. The situation in Aleppo is particularly worrying since groups that some international actors call the "moderate opposition" are simultaneously fighting the Al-Nusra Front terrorists. This military collaboration affects the political settlement of the armed conflict. As has been reiterated in various resolutions, terrorist and associated groups are excluded from the negotiations and should be fought.

The cessation of hostilities has established areas of peace that have helped civilians attend to their urgent needs. That is why we must build on the ceasefire and advance the strengthening of local ceasefire agreements with a view to achieving a political agreement to put an end to the conflict. We should therefore like to take this opportunity to express our support for what by Mr. O'Brien proposal concerning weekly, 48-hour humanitarian pauses. That would help to alleviate the difficult conditions in which civilians find themselves. We recognize that in some cases the situations on the ground make it difficult for humanitarian agencies to carry out their work; it is therefore necessary to lift the sieges in all affected areas and comply with the provisions of resolution 2268 (2016). We condemn the practices that violate international humanitarian law.

We recognize the current cooperation between the Syrian authorities and the World Food Programme, an institution which has reached more than 4 million people and undertaken 70 airdrops for the inhabitants of Deir ez-Zor. Al-Raqqa is one of the areas where humanitarian needs have become more acute because of the control being exercised by ISIS, which is referred to in the report of the Secretary-General (S/2016/631).

We also pay tribute to the humanitarian agencies deployed in the field. They are undertaking commendable work in adverse and highly risky conditions. We repeat that these agencies must not be military targets, much less actors in the armed conflict. Their only task is to provide assistance to those who need it most, in accordance with the provisions of international humanitarian law. However, their work should be coordinated with the State concerned, in accordance with international law.

We reiterate our condemnation of ISIS for systematically denying access to humanitarian assistance to the civilian population, as well as for enforced disappearances, criminal actions against ethnic minorities, women and the recruitment of children in the areas it controls and the use of civilians as human shields, which we have been informed is taking place in Manbij. ISIS, the Al-Nusra Front and their associates have become the greatest threat to peace and stability in the region. Their influence must be fought with all the necessary means, in accordance with international law.

Similarly, we join others in rejecting today the recent beheading of a 12-year-old Palestinian boy. That happened in Aleppo and was executed by an armed group called the "moderate rebels", which enjoys international support. So far we have not heard any condemnation of that brutal murder by those who are

financing these groups. These terrorist practices are no different from those executed by the Al-Nusra Front and ISIS. Moreover, their actions are in violation of international humanitarian law and human rights law. They represent a war crime and those responsible must be brought to justice.

We take this opportunity to condemn the recruitment of minors. That practice undermines the provisions of the Council with regard to children in armed conflict.

Finally, we reiterate that overcoming the humanitarian crisis depends on putting an the end to the armed conflict. That is why we reaffirm our support for the efforts of the Special Envoy Staffan de Mistura to establish peace and to find a political and peaceful solution to the Syrian armed conflict. However tragic the situation may be on the ground, it must not be an obstacle to bringing the parties to the conflict to the table. We therefore call on the parties and those with influence on them to resume the political negotiations as soon as possible. Like all members of the Security Council have said, the situation requires a political solution and we must endeavour to make that a reality. The prolongation of the conflict will mean only more suffering and destruction for the Syrian people.

Mr. Seck (Senegal) (*spoke in French*): At the outset, I would like to commend Mr.Stephen O'Brien, Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs and Emergency Relief Coordinator, for the clarity of his briefing. I would also like to commend the high quality of the twenty-ninth report (S/2016/631) presented to the Council, pursuant to resolution 2168 (2013), 2171 (2014) and 2258 (2258). Today, it is quite clear that the cessation of hostilities, which is crucial for humanitarian assistance and a sine qua non for the peace process, is seriously compromised. That is demonstrated by clashes between the Syrian army and opposition armed groups in various areas, including Damascus, Rif Dimashq and eastern Ghouta, which have resulted in numerous victims and injured.

Like previous speakers, I would like to convey my deep concern given the escalation of military actions taken by the Government forces in Aleppo, which have resulted in many victims, including many civilians, in particular children.

Along the same lines, the Senegalese delegation condemns the attacks by armed groups against the part of the city that is under the Government's control, which have led to many civilian casualties. That is why we recall the obligation that falls on warring sides under international humanitarian law and human rights law, as the increasing bombings threaten those on the ground — between 200,000 and 300,000 people in Aleppo — as a result of the blocked Castillo road, the only route to access the eastern part of the city. We also call on the Syrian authorities, with the help of the International Syria Support Group (ISSG), in particular the co-chairs — the Russian Federation and the United States of America — to work to ensure that the Syrian populations can be assisted by responding to the request of humanitarian players to implement the weekly cease-fire. It is worth noting that in addition to more than hundreds of dead, many wounded, this violence has resulted in the displacement of tens of thousand people, in particular in Idlib, where according to figures 45,000 fled air strikes.

Children continue to bear the brunt of the war. In addition to issues of civil status, family displacements and early marriage, the phenomenon of child soldiers remains of utmost concern. My delegation would like to know the fate of 150 children who were kidnapped from the Thib Antar school to serve as child soldiers, when they should have been taking exams.

With regard to humanitarian assistance, my delegation welcomes the ongoing efforts of stakeholders, in particular those of the United Nations and the Syrian Arab Red Crescent, to alleviate the suffering of the millions of Syrians affected by war. However, let us not lose sight of the fact that the goal of providing 1,500,000 people with assistance, which was established by the United Nations, has not been achieved owing to violence and administrative delays. We would therefore call upon the Government to work to ensure that the goal of 1.2 million people be reached in July.

There is a particular need for further authorizations for United Nations staff. While such authorizations have allowed for progress in the provision of aid to besieged and hard-to-reach areas, the number of people living in such areas has increased by approximately 900,000 — from 4.6 million to 5.45 million — mainly due to the violence.

The ongoing destruction of public infrastructure, such as markets, schools and hospitals, particularly in the Aleppo and Idlib governorates, continues to be of concern for us. In addition, erratic access to basic

social services, such as electricity in cities, is affecting some 2 million people. In that context, UNICEF's commendable efforts to provide more than 3 million litres of water to 2 million people should be welcomed.

The United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East is experiencing difficulty in deploying at some of the camps in Yalda, from which the camp at Yarmuk is provisioned for the purpose of serving Palestinian refugees. That is due to clashes between the Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant and the Al-Nusra Front, which is a real source of concern for us. We welcome the efforts of the World Health Organization and UNICEF thanks to which 772,000 children have been vaccinated, which represents 53.6 per cent coverage. We would like to take this opportunity to ask about those children who have not been reached due to violence in the localities of Deir ez-Zor and Raqqa.

The Senegalese delegation welcomes the excellent cooperation that United Nations bodies continues to enjoy with the Turkish and Jordanian Governments. My delegation would like to take this opportunity to pay due tribute to the members of the medical and humanitarian staff, who continue — sometimes at the risk of their lives — to help the Syrian people in their quest for peace and dignity.

Finally, my delegation would like to reiterate its belief, which is shared by everyone here, that only a political solution, which is being discussed in Geneva under the auspices of the United Nations, can help end the Syrian humanitarian catastrophe. We therefore call upon stakeholders and the countries of the region, as well as the International Syria Support Group, particularly its Chairs, to push for peace in the region.

After six public debates on the humanitarian situation in Syria and one public debate on the political situation, the Security Council should scale up its effort to help reach a political solution, pursuant to the obligation we imposed on ourselves in resolution 2254 (2015) with the 1 August deadline for starting the transition process. Terrorist organizations are taking full advantage of the situation in Syria, with the growing risk of our seeing them take hold of materials out of which they are going to make weapons of mass destruction. The terrorist contagion is spreading, which means that the Security Council has to do everything it can to stop it.

Mr. Lucas (Angola): We thank Under-Secretary-General Stephen O'Brien for his briefing on the disturbing humanitarian situation in Syria.

Most regrettably, the conflict in Syria continues while the parties completely disregard their obligations under international humanitarian law and the relevant Security Council resolutions. This is an irrational war that is disproportionately affecting the civilian population.

After a short respite, with the partial cessation of hostilities and improvements in humanitarian access, we are now witnessing the escalation of violence in and around the city of Aleppo, with hundreds of thousands trapped by the fighting and unable to access basic assistance. As the Security Council tries to exert pressure for the cessation of hostilities and a return to negotiations, the parties on the ground continue to strive for military gains. The closure of the last remaining access route in and out of eastern Aleppo, cutting off all civilians from humanitarian assistance, is just the latest demonstration of the total disregard there is for the Council's resolutions and international humanitarian law.

Although we fully support humanitarian agencies in their efforts to address critical life-saving assistance, such as food, medical supplies and fuel, and its supply to all besieged and hard-to-reach areas, the recent escalation in fighting between Government forces and non-State armed groups should lead us to focus on where these non-State armed groups are acquiring weapons and resources. One issue that is barely mentioned in our discussions is the fact that regional and international stakeholders are not being held responsible for providing the means that allow this bloody war to continue. Paradoxically, humanitarian assistance is blocked or is made hard to reach for those in need, while the means to make war continue reaching the parties to the conflict.

In conclusion, we urge the parties to return to negotiations so that a political solution to this bloody war may be found and so that humanitarian agencies may have unconditional, safe and unhindered access to all those in need. We condemn the air strikes and bombings in eastern and western Aleppo in the recent weeks that have resulted in numerous deaths and injuries, among which there were many children, as well as the destruction of hospitals and other vital civilian infrastructure. While we support the establishment of

a humanitarian truce, as requested by the Secretary-General, to allow humanitarian agencies access to those in desperate need of food and water, among other basic necessities, we emphasize that the proliferation of terrorist groups and other non-State armed groups poses a dangerous threat, not only for Syria but for the entire region. The Security Council and the International Syria Support Group must step up concerted efforts to cut off the flow of arms into Syria and jointly combat the growing threat of radicalism and terrorists.

Mr. Ibrahim (Malaysia): I thank Under-Secretary-General Stephen O'Brien for his briefing, which brought into the Security Council the gruesome reality of the besieged areas in Syria and the horrendous suffering of the people there. That has prompted my delegation, and me, to ask to take the floor in response.

Earlier this month we waited in anticipation as access was granted by the Syrian authorities to the United Nations to bring its humanitarian programme to the 34 out of 35 besieged and hard-to-reach areas, either partially or in full. We had high hope that it was a positive development building on the breakthrough following the 1 June deadline by the International Syria Support Group, and that it would lead to more sustained access to all besieged and hard-to-reach areas. The promising outlook we had at the beginning of the month quickly diminished, however, with the disturbing news that about 300,000 people in eastern Aleppo had been cut off from humanitarian assistance, thereby triggering death and a constant struggle against starvation.

The closure of the Castello road more than a week ago effectively blocked civilian and humanitarian movement, and it is deeply worrying that trapped civilians are being subject to heavy shelling, as violence in Aleppo escalated. Much to our horror, civilian casualties and fatalities are increasing, and hospitals and other medical facilities continue to be targeted and destroyed. Indiscriminate attacks and air strikes in Aleppo resulted, inter alia, in the death of almost 100 civilians in bombings last Tuesday. We welcome a commitment to investigating that unfortunate incident.

While we know the importance of the fight against terrorist groups in Syria, such attacks must not be at the expense of civilians. A humanitarian pause at this critical juncture should be given serious consideration. The revolting beheading of a 12-year-old Palestinian boy in Aleppo last week, allegedly perpetrated by a member of the moderate opposition, highlights the plight of children in Aleppo. In addition to more than 200,000 children killed in Menbij last week, the United Nations Children's Fund has reported that a further 235,000 are trapped in the area. Priority must be given to allowing civilians, especially children, to flee to safety from their homes. The unspeakable crimes committed against them must end.

The Council only recently welcomed the Iraqi Government's approach, which consisted of applying a pause in the fight against the Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant in Fallujah to facilitate the safe passage of civilians, protected from mortars and missiles. The same standard must be applied to Aleppo. We must hasten the political process, abandon these sieges and end this carnage. Delays would only cause more deaths and bring the dehumanizing level of suffering to a new low.

The President: I will now deliver my own statement in my national capacity.

I thank Under-Secretary-General O'Brien for his detailed briefing. Japan expresses strong concern about the increasingly desperate situation in Syria. It is intolerable that eastern Aleppo, Menbij and some other places appear to be on their way to being added to the list of besieged locations. We are disappointed that July's humanitarian access plan has been poorly implemented thus far. We commend the enormous efforts made by the United Nations, such humanitarian bodies as the International Committee of the Red Cross and the Syrian Arab Red Crescent, and the co-chairs of the International Syria Support Group to secure access to besieged and hard-to-reach areas.

Meanwhile, it is obvious that increased airstrikes and fighting on the ground block and delay sustained humanitarian access. Mr. O'Brien reminded us of the importance of implementing our own resolutions, especially resolution 2286 (2016), which addresses the protection of civilians, medical personnel and facilities. This resolution does not focus on any specific conflict area, but Syria is a place where such protection is definitely necessary. In that regard, ongoing efforts by the United States and Russia to extend the cessation of hostilities to hotspots like eastern Aleppo are critically important.

Even a temporary ceasefire can allow the United Nations and humanitarian bodies to reach those Syrians who are desperately awaiting interagency convoys. Japan fully supports Mr. O'Brien's proposal to hold

weekly, 48-hour cessations of hostilities to secure United Nations inter-agency humanitarian access. I wish to conclude by stating that Japan, along with other Council members and the International Syria Support Group, will continue to support and work towards a lasting political settlement.

I now resume my functions as President of the Security Council.

The representative of the Russian Federation has asked for the floor to make a further statement.

Mr. Churkin (Russian Federation) (*spoke in Russian*): I have just two or three brief comments to make.

First, with regard to my American colleague's response to the question of the bombing in northern Syria, which, according to press reports, has killed many civilians, I will not conceal my surprise at her remark that the investigations would be conducted based on information from civil society groups. So there are no American drones, no American special forces in Syria, no coalition special forces, no United States satellites with intelligence capacity, no video recordings, which are made by all modern-day bombers when they make a hit. I would not like to believe that the United States-led alliance is in such a woeful military state. This reference to civil society makes me think that we are never really going to know the truth; it will all be swept under the carpet.

With regard to Ms. Power's assertion that Russia has never acknowledged or investigated, allow me to recall that whenever an insinuation arises here, she immediately starts talking very loudly about this in the Security Council without even waiting for corroboration. In fact, investigations took place immediately, and the very same day or the next day, at our briefings with the Ministry of Defence, we demonstrated the unjustified nature of the insinuations made in the course of the propaganda war surrounding Syria. I truly hope that the United States-led coalition will act with similar openness.

Lastly, I would like to make a general comment. I am not sure whether it is a coincidence or perhaps intentional that we are increasingly digressing into the concrete details in the Security Council. There are two groups that discuss such matters: the humanitarian group and the group for the ceasefire. In Geneva they discuss details, but the Security Council is, after all, a political body. But we are digressing into discussions concerning Aleppo, the Castillo road and many other situations. We can discuss that, of course, but what I am saying is, let us not lose sight of the bigger picture — the root causes of the tragedy and dynamics in Syria.

It all began with an effort to topple a legitimate Government and promote regime change. At that time, the idea of using terrorists for that purpose did not seem so bad. Finally, it was understood that terrorists could take power in Syria, as was the case in Iraq, and then another huge error was made, namely, the preparation of the so-called moderate opposition, which was supposed to fight not with the Government but with terrorists. Those groups were immediately routed and went over to the side of the Al-Nusra Front and other terrorists, taking with them the weapons that had been given to them by the Western sponsors of these reckless programmes.

Therefore, had the Syrian border been closed to military convoys — as we have said on many occasions — and and had the Castillo road been open only to humanitarian convoys, we would not be faced with situation prevailing in Aleppo today. If the United States had made good on its promises, which it has been making for at least half a year, to separate the Al-Nusra Front from the so-called moderate opposition, then we would not have the situation that is prevailing in eastern Aleppo and some other areas of Syria.

With all my criticism of the United States, which I have been unable to avoid, I want to confirm that we continue to work with the United States as co-chairs of the International Syria Support Group. It is very tense, difficult work, and I hope we can soon build the international community's capacity to combat the Al-Nusra Front and other terrorist organizations so as to radically improve the humanitarian situation in Syria in combination with political talks whose speedy resumption we are pressing for.

The President: The representative of the United States has asked for the floor to make a further statement.

Ms. Power (United States of America): I would like to say a couple of words in response.

First of all, I think that it would be very useful if the Russian Federation could circulate the results of its investigation to the Council. Personally, having been very concerned about Russian strikes — particularly on hospitals in Aleppo and other areas that the Syrian

regime has decided to pursue during the cessation of hostilities — we would welcome those investigations but would also be curious about whether Russia, in those investigations, has ever acknowledged harming civilians in its strikes in the Syrian theatre. It would be very useful to have that information shared with us.

The second point is, I think, more fundamental, as one of the things that has created such division over the Syria conflict. Fundamentally, if the like and the unlike are lumped together, if the parties to the cessation of hostilities are lumped together with those who have rejected the cessation of hostilities, if civilians are lumped together with the Al-Nusra Front and the Islamic State in the Iraq and the Sham, and if those who have been lumped together are targeted along with terrorist groups, not only will innocents just minding their own business who do not deserve to be targeted be killed — something that has happened in spades and that the Syrian regime has done from the beginning of the conflict — but the seeds for more conflict will be sown, more terrorists will be created and a conflict that has gone on and caused too much heartbreak already will be prolonged. Therefore, from a peace and security standpoint, a core reason to distinguish between parties to the cessation of hostilities and terrorist groups, between terrorist fighters and civilians who find themselves stuck in their vicinity is to save innocent lives and to promote peace and security.

Thirdly, as I said in my earlier remarks, we are deeply invested in the United States-Russian effort to bring peace to Syria. I think it is fair to say that in the early days of that effort we saw a material return and significant benefit for some people in Syria. We saw more access to besieged areas than we had ever seen before. Every one of the besieged areas, as I also noted my remarks, has now been reached, albeit some places with only one convoy. We saw a reduction in violence, which was a huge relief to people in those parts of Syria who got to experience that reduction in horrific violence.

But let us be real: the description at the outset of the Russian Ambassador's remarks was not a description of Syria. It might be a description of some kind of Potemkin village in Syria, but Aleppo is burning. Aleppo is being besieged. The single lifeline to the city, and to nearly 300,000 people, has been cut off by this regime, backed by that regime. We are deeply invested in trying to make this work, but we have got to see the siege of Aleppo end and access restored — or all of our good intentions are going to be for naught and this conflict is going to continue, along with the terrorist threat and the refugee flow that emanate from it, with all that has meant for the neighbouring countries and for Europe, and all that it will mean for the global order.

Let us start with Aleppo. Let us get Aleppo right. Let us save people. And let us continue to invest — again, in the kind of cooperation that is needed to bring this conflict to an end. Part of that cooperation means distinguishing between terrorist actors and those who would deliberately target civilians — as the regime does — and those who do not.

The President: The representative of the Russian Federation has asked for the floor to make a further statement.

Mr. Churkin (Russian Federation) (*spoke in Russian*): I do not agree with a number of the observations made by Ms. Power, but I would simply like to note that she rightly pointed out that it is important to distinguish between the moderate opposition and Jabhat Al-Nusra, which is exactly what we are saying. As for the rest, I am not going to engage in dispute, as I would like to end on a positive note and I want to hear from our colleague the Rermanent Representative of Syria.

The President: I now give the floor to the representative of the Syrian Arab Republic.

Mr. Ja'afari (Syria) (*spoke in Arabic*): First of all, I would like to thank you, Mr. President, for having convened this meeting. I would also like to thank you because, during this meeting, we have heard the views of the members of the Security Council. As an open meeting, this is truly an opportunity to listen to the views of different countries about the changing situation in my country, Syria. In that regard, I would like to share some comments on the subject we are dealing with today.

The Security Council is meeting today to discuss the twenty-eighth report of the Secretary-General (S/2016/631) on the humanitarian situation in Syria. The Council has already adopted resolutions 2139 (2014), 2165 (2014), 2191 (2014) and 2258 (2015), on what has been referred to as the humanitarian crisis. Nevertheless, we have not achieved the hoped-for improvement in the humanitarian situation in Syria. Syrians are therefore rightfully asking why their suffering has not been alleviated after almost five and a half years since the beginning of the international

terrorist war waged against my country by several countries, including members of the Security Council. The Ambassador of Angola was quite right in asking why we do not hold regional and international parties accountable for the continued humanitarian crisis and the international terrorist war against my country. That is a vital question that must be asked.

Bringing about a sustainable end to the suffering of the Syrian people cannot be achieved by prolonging their suffering indefinitely, or by holding them hostage to political blackmail — as certain capitals are trying to do by putting the Syrian people between a rock and a hard place and forcing them to choose between ongoing terrorism or abandoning their country to chaos. We cannot improve the situation by issuing dozens of reports or by holding periodic meetings and sensationalist conferences — nor, in fact, by providing humanitarian assistance to one region over another. However important such humanitarian assistance may be, it must be provided equally to all regions. The so-called coalition forces — led by the United States of America — will not put an end to the suffering by destroying grain silos, electrical facilities and power plants, costing the Syrian people money and effort that are difficult to repay; nor by making light of the relative geography of Syrian bloodshed; and nor by establishing dubious alliances to eliminate terrorism. Instead, it can be achieved by seriously combating terrorism, as is being done by the Syrian Government with the help of the Russian Federation, at the request of the Syrian Government itself, which has led to an improvement in the humanitarian situation in certain regions of Syria.

The solution is clear to us all, including the entire Council and Mr. O'Brien. It means dealing with the root causes of the crisis that has been imposed on the Syrian people. This is a crisis that has been imposed on — not created by — the Syrian people. Some members of this organ insistently and deliberately ignore the real cause of the humanitarian crisis in Syria and of the exacerbation of the crisis. They attempt to ignore the reasons that led a large number of Syrians to seek refuge in the areas of our country controlled by the Government and many others to do so abroad. The basic cause of this crisis is terrorism.

As we informed members at the beginning of the crisis in this very Chamber, Aleppo had not experienced any terrorist activities in the first year and a half. We had called upon Council members to assist the Syrian Government in pressuring the Government of Turkey to close the borders in order to make it impossible for terrorists to reach Aleppo. But there was no response. That led to the entry of tens of thousands of genetically modified terrorists from all over the world, who came to be called the "moderate opposition" or "non-State armed groups". Those groups did what they did in Aleppo.

In response to references made to Castello road, I would like to say that the Syrian Government has not closed that road. Instead, it is attempting to open and liberate it from the terrorists who use it to block the flow of humanitarian assistance into Aleppo and Idlib. The Government is also attempting to deny terrorists coming from Turkey entry via that road. Terrorism is the main cause of the Syrian crisis, first and foremost; furthermore, the unilateral coercive measures that have paralysed economic activity are another cause of the humanitarian crisis in my country. A sustainable solution would therefore consist in combatting terrorism by implementing the resolutions of the Security Council itself, in coordination and full cooperation with the Syrian Government and free of the double standards and hypocrisy that have been demonstrated by certain parties in the fight against terrorism. Such a solution must also avoid making Syria a magnet that would attract more terrorists.

The representative of the United States of America spoke earlier of the crimes perpetrated against a young Palestinian refugee by the Harakat Nour al-Din al-Zenki, a group of Turkish origin. She spoke of those who slit the throat of a child as "rebels" but she did not call them terrorists. The same holds true for other terrorist groups, including the Jaysh Al-Islam, the Jaysh Al-Fatah and others. Turkey, Qatar, Saudi Arabia and other countries should end their support for the armed terrorist groups that, in certain villages of Syria, have committed atrocious acts against civilians whom they use as human shields.

They must also stop legitimizing these armed terrorist groups in Syria by referring to them as the "moderate armed opposition" or as "non-State armed groups". All such epithets seek to convey neutrality, but they are incompatible with the provisions of the Security Council's own anti-terrorism resolutions. The mere fact of not calling terrorism by its name sends a false message to hundreds of terrorist groups that their terrorism is legitimate so long as it is undertaken in defiance of the Syrian Government and they continue

to destroy infrastructure and to open the way to further human and material loss.

French aircraft recently bombed the village of Al-Tukhan, killing 164 people whom Da'esh had taken hostage and was using as human shields. But when the leaders of Da'esh heard the French President claim that he would seek vengeance for the attack in Nice, they gave orders for the village to be evacuated. Thus, the Da'esh fighters left Al-Tukhan just before the French bombing. The French airforce went ahead and bombed the village anyway, claiming twice the number of victims as the Nice attack. The President of France had sought revenge for Nice by killing 164 civilians in that Syrian village. Who used those villagers as human shields? It was Da'esh who killed civilians under the cloak of the mission of revenge launched by the French and United States airforces.

We have submitted dozens of examples of similar acts through official channels. I will not scroll through a lengthy list of names, as was done by the representative of the United States, because it would take me weeks to list all the victims of terrorist attacks in Syria. Let us instead name those who attacked Le Bataclan and the offices of *Charlie Hebdo* in France, or who perpetrated the attacks in San Bernardino, Munich and Bangladesh. Why not give the names of all the groups that have committed such terrorist acts? Why not call them the "armed opposition"? Why do we say that terrorism in Syria is carried out by the moderate opposition, instead calling their attacks "terrorist acts carried out by terrorists"? There is no legitimate, halal terrorism on one side and non-legitimate terrorism on the other. It is all terrorism, and it is our people who are suffering from it.

The proof of what I am saying lies in the fact that, a few days ago, the Harakat Nour al-Din al-Zenki terrorist group decapitated a 12-year old Palestinian boy. In an horrific act, they cut off his head. That organization is said by certain States to belong to the moderate armed opposition. Those very same Governments have assisted such entities by providing media support since late 2011. The practices of those terrorist groups do not differ one whit from those of similar terrorist groups, including Jaysh Al-Islam, Ahrar Al-Sham, Jaysh Muhammad Abu Ubaidah Al-Muhajir, Al-Liwa Al-Tawhid, the Badr Martyrs' Brigade, the Army of Mujahideen, the Islamic Front, the Jaysh Al-Fatah, the Turkistan Islamic Party, the Sultan Murad Brigade and others that are described by some, both within and outside the Security Council, as a "moderate opposition army".

These entities are said to be a part of the moderate opposition, but their supporters have turned them into monsters and cannibals whose favourite pastime is to take selfies with their decapitated innocent victims, and who push people from the rooftops and burn their victims alive in Aleppo and the villages. We can never know the names of the many thousands of women and children who have been taken hostage in the cities of Syria. We will never know their names, but they are the victims of horrendous crimes against humanity. We need no investigations, evidence or police dogs to identify those responsible for those acts. We know who they are.

We cannot explain how some members of the Security Council that claim to protect human rights and the rule of law continue to prevent some of those groups from being included on the list of terrorist organizations. They know that if they were to do so they would be giving them the green light to continue to kill and decapitate. That reveals their total lack of sincerity in their fight against terrorism, which they use as a political weapon to pressure the Government of Syria, which has met its constitutional obligations with respect to protecting its citizens and combatting terrorism.

Nevertheless, we cannot work alone. We need the Council's support, and we need it to understand the scope of the threat posed by the terrorism we are facing in Syria, in the region and throughout the world. This danger is beginning to affect Council members themselves, in their own countries. I am firmly convinced that the citizens of the countries that have been engulfed by this wave of terrorist acts can legitimately ask themselves about the reasons that are leading their countries' Governments to turn a blind eye to such acts.

Talk of combating terrorism and the lifting of unilateral coercive measures brings me to the second step needed to resolve the humanitarian crisis, that is, support for a political solution, because combating terrorism can only contribute to success in that respect. The solution should ensure that there is respect for the sovereignty, independence and territorial integrity of Syria, as affirmed by all relevant resolutions of the Security Council on Syria. This is in keeping with the provisions of the United Nations Charter and the principles of international law, so as to ensure that

abuses and crimes that contravene these principles are not repeated, as was the case in Iraq, Libya and elsewhere.

In this regard, the Government of my country has closely read the statement issued following the visit of the American Secretary of State to Moscow on 15 July. In that statement, both parties, Russia and the United States, asserted the need to combat the terrorism fomented by the Al-Nusra Front and Da'esh. The Syrian Arab Republic, which is at the forefront in terms of combating this global scourge, welcomed the statements and reiterates that we are committed to finding a political solution to the Syrian crisis that meets the aspirations of the Syrian people and ensures their support. We are ready to pursue the inter-Syrian dialogue without any preconditions in the hope that the dialogue will lead to a comprehensive solution devised by the Syrian people themselves, without foreign interference and with the support of United Nations and the international community.

I wish to reiterate that the Syrian Government fully supports its commitment and obligation to alleviate the humanitarian suffering of the Syrian people. We are prepared to take every step necessary at the national level to reach that goal. We will continue to cooperate with the United Nations by facilitating its mission, but that cooperation is not just a one-way street. The United Nations also must cooperate with the Government of Syria and coordinate with it with it with regard to the various humanitarian issues rather than take issue with Syria and criticize it, which will not lead to any positive results.

The United Nations and international organizations active in Syria could not have achieved what they did over the five years of this crisis in terms of providing humanitarian assistance to millions of Syrians on a monthly basis had it not been for the cooperation, facilities and protection provided by the Syrian Government. This is not a favour we are doing, as long as Syrian people in need benefit from such humanitarian assistance and there is respect for sovereignty.

I would like to recall what was said on 12 December 2012 in Marrakesh, when an attempt was made to create an opposition. The French Minister for Foreign Affairs at the time, Mr. Fabius, said, "The jihadists are active in Syria". He said,

(*spoke in French*)

> "I cannot do anything to prevent French jihadists from going to Syria".

(*spoke in Arabic*)

That was said by a former Prime Minister. When French terrorism struck in Nice, at the Bataclan and against Charlie Hebdo, the French President took revenge by bombing the village of Manbij, killing 164 civilians.

I could say a great deal more, but owing to time constraints I will end here.

The President: I now give the floor to Mr. O'Brien to respond to the comments made and questions raised.

Mr. O'Brien: I shall be brief and simply seek to address some of the questions that were raised and then leave it at that.

In particular, I was asked by the representative of Spain to give a little bit more detail on the Castello road issue, and, as I said in my statement, eastern Aleppo City is currently at serious risk of besiegement, and a besieged eastern Aleppo would add at least a quarter of a million people to the current number of besieged civilians, bringing this to somewhere near 1 million people. In order to prevent this from happening, since 7 July, civilian, humanitarian and commercial movements in or out of the eastern part of Aleppo City have, as the Council is aware, come to a halt, and we need to reposition food stocks that would be sufficient for at least one month for the 150,000 people in need of food assistance in eastern Aleppo.

Basic health supplies, excluding anaesthetics and surgical items, will be sufficient for about four to five months, so long as water continues to be pumped through the water-pumping stations. The entire Aleppo City is located in eastern Aleppo, so we have tried to establish an access route across the conflict lines via our United Nations hub in the Government-controlled western Aleppo City. There is, as was referred to by another representative, some movement between east and west. A request was included in the July convoy plan and has been approved by the Syrian authorities. We have, however, not yet been able to go because of the security situation. So the question about the Castello road is an absolutely key moment, as will be clear from the point of view of why we are asking for a 48-hour humanitarian pause. Because the Castello road is now

so damaged, it cannot take large lorries, only very small lorries; so in order to get the necessary quantities, we need a longer period of time for the added number of trucks to be able to proceed and, indeed, to return once they have delivered. So that is why the Castello road issue and the clarification that was sought is so absolutely vital and therefore a crunch point.

I was also asked by the United Kingdom representative about the continuing United Nations plan on airdrops to access besieged areas and, as is well known, the United Nations is using various logistical methods to bring assistance to people in need throughout Syria by every means possible, land, sea and air. The World Food Programme, as has been noted already, has developed concrete plans for airdrops and air bridges to other locations, so International Syria Support Group members are aware of what is needed to make this a reality.

The World Food Programme has indicated that the consent of the Government of Syria and security guarantees from all parties would be a precondition; in any event, it is a precondition of the civilian operators of those proposed air operations. So we continue to plan for airdrops and air bridges, as we have said all along, but land access remains the priority. It is the safest; it is able to get much more value by far for the financial resources made available to support the provision of food and non-food items to those in humanitarian need and is therefore the most effective. It takes approximately six weeks of daily helicopter rotations to transport the equivalent amount of food that was delivered by road from Damascus to Al-Dameer on 1 June in one convoy, which was for 22,500 people. Therefore, until we have land access to reach all besieged locations, all options remain on the table. Of course, that is part of the discussion we are having with Member States to help us get the most effective and efficient access routes available. But the air plan remains.

I think the representative of the Russian Federation asked a question about safety and security in night deployment. On 29 June, we deployed a convoy to Arbin and Zamalka. Due to the process of receiving facilitation letters, the loading of the convoy could be done only in the afternoon. Therefore, while we have to look after the safety and security of our personnel, and look to all the parties to provide it, that has to apply to both night and day. I would, however, like to reiterate my call that the priority has to be for daylight movement. I repeat my thanks to the Russian Federation for its facilitation in the most recent cases in that regard. It certainly allows not only for needs assessments, but for safer and more secure delivery.

I was also asked — or at least concern was expressed — by the representative of the Russian Federation about the possibility of bias in terms of whether the United Nations was providing assistance to all the millions of people who have needs on a completely neutral and impartial basis. I would just like to reiterate my assurances that, through all the modalities that we deploy each month, our assistance is purely judged on humanitarian principles, which I think he has acknowledged. It is assessed and delivered exclusively on a needs basis. Our staff are, clearly, not only very conscious; it is part of their professional approach as the United Nations — and indeed our partners — to be impartial, neutral and independent. That is a deep principle that we as humanitarians very much know we must adopt and adhere to, as it is the licence by which we can most likely gain access in all circumstances, both now and in future.

I would repeat to the Council that we would ask all members to help us get access on that needs basis, as it has been shown that there is no equivalence — although there are many more numbers at the moment in besieged areas — with regard to areas besieged by the Government of Syria and areas besieged by other parties to the conflict. We are seeking equally to address those who are besieged in Fo'ah and Kafraya, as part of the four towns agreement, as much as we are in Deir ez-Zor, where 110,000 people besieged by the Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant continue to be in severe humanitarian need. As I say, each and every one who has humanitarian needs is not an equivalence in terms of numbers; each and every person is being assessed irrespective of the overall quantum. Again, our assessment is always based on need.

The final point I would like to conclude with, if I may, is to welcome the fact that the broad, emerging sense that calls for a 48-hour humanitarian pause, in particular into eastern Aleppo city, seems to have caught a sense of appropriateness, proportionality, immediacy and urgency. I sense there is an amber-to-green light, if I can put it that way, within the Security Council. I would like to say how significant that would be. It would be a genuine point of progress, it would help us, through humanitarian pauses in those active areas of fighting where there is imminent besiegement affecting, as we have heard, many more hundreds of

thousands of people than we have already been dealing with, to reach those civilians trapped behind the front lines, and they could reach life-saving services, which they simply cannot access at the moment.

That is why, realistically, we need at least 72 hours' notice for a 48-hour window of calm to deliver in those locations. My team on the ground has developed a proposal, which was presented to the International Syria Support Group humanitarian task force last week, to ensure safe, periodic, facilitated humanitarian access into eastern Aleppo: a proposed 48-hour pause every mid-week, that is, eight days per month, so that cross-border actors could deliver aid for about 250,000 people, including the 150,000 already in need of food aid, and to prevent others from becoming equally vulnerable. Such a pause would rely on the United Nations monitoring mechanism that already exists with regard to access from Turkey. As I said earlier in my response to the representative of Spain, 48 hours is necessary to allow sufficient time for the smaller trucks, which we now need to use along the Castello road given its current state of damage, as well as the number of returning empty trucks to give us sufficient supplies on a regular basis. The proposed pause — and I think this is an important point to mention — would also entail a medical evacuation component, so that we not only have goods in but we have evacuations out. That was a central point of my initial remarks.

For the cross-line operation, as opposed to the cross-border, a convoy targeting 60,000 civilians, out of the 120,000 that we have requested as the United Nations, in eastern Aleppo for July has been approved by the Government of Syria. That was done prior to the escalation to Aleppo. A request for increased assistance, I suspect, will be presented as required in the coming months.

I just wanted to give that detail so that the Council is fully aware of what that would entail if that is an emerging point of consensus.

The President: I thank Mr. O'Brien for the clarifications he has provided.

The representative of the Syrian Arab Republic has asked for the floor to make a further statement. I now give him the floor.

Mr. Ja'afari (Syria) (*spoke in Arabic*): I apologize for asking for the floor again. I will not take too much time. I would just like to share with the members of the Security Council some information that has not been part of this meeting.

First, I regret that no one mentioned the fact that terrorists in the Wadi Barada region — outside of Damascus near Madaya, which, as some members already know is under siege, or so it is said — have bombed the only source that provides drinking water to the city of Damascus. That means that the inhabitants of Damascus, 7 million civilians, have been deprived of drinking water because the moderate armed/genetically modified armed opposition blew up the main source of water for the city.

Secondly, I would also like to remind the Council that terrorists of the Islamic State in Iraq and Syria burned alive a family in a public square — father, mother and a 2-year-old child — because they wanted to escape Raqqa. No one mentioned what happened with this family or what occurred with the Wadi Barad water source, not even Mr. O'Brien.

With regard to bombing Aleppo, there are airstrikes from east Aleppo and from west Aleppo. However, Mr. O'Brien did not say who was striking from those parts of the city. They are the terrorists we are fighting — the terrorists that the Western alliance claims to be fighting. They are the terrorists who cross over from Turkey, who are financed by the corrupt regimes of the Gulf — Saudi Arabia and Qatar, to name them. Those are terrorists who are striking Aleppo from the east and the west.

We genuinely hope that, when the Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs wants to talk about events in Syria and says that there is shelling, he mentions the party striking. More than 100 people were killed or injured in Damascus alone. I will send the Council official letters including the names of the victims — scores of them, women and children — killed in Damascus, in restaurants and public parks. The same goes for Aleppo. We therefore ask: who are the perpetrators? Why was that not mentioned?

The President: I now invite Council members to informal consultations to continue our discussion on the subject.

The meeting rose at 12.40 p.m.